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Monday 15 May 1978

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DIA review(s)

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ISRAEL: Interview with Chief of Staff

[] Israel's new Chief of Staff, Rafael Eitan, has stirred up a public controversy by asserting in a television interview on Thursday that the Arabs are still bent on destroying Israel and that Israel must retain both the West Bank and the Golan Heights. The US Embassy in Tel Aviv does not believe Eitan's remarks signal a hardening in the Israeli negotiating position, but that he was restating--in more forceful terms--the government's stand. Eitan's views reflect the deep-seated suspicions of the Egyptians and other Arabs still widely held within the government and among the general public.

[] Israeli doves in the opposition Labor Party as well as in the Democratic Movement for Change, one of the governing coalition parties, have predictably denounced Eitan for exceeding his authority in discussing political questions and possibly harming the negotiating process. Even the moderately conservative *Jerusalem Post* has taken Eitan sharply to task for challenging civilian authority and laying down the "terms on which the armed forces" would defend the country.

[] Although somewhat embarrassed by Eitan's bluntness, Defense Minister Weizman and Finance Minister Ehrlich have come to his defense, presumably in part to avoid further antagonizing hard-liners in their own parties. Eitan's views have struck a responsive cord among many within the ruling coalition who regard the opposition's criticism as hypocritical and purely political.

[] Because the Chief of Staff has an excellent reputation with the Israeli public, the government probably hopes to use him to counter former Chiefs of Staff Rabin and Bar-Lev in the Labor Party, who have been critical lately of the government's military competence.

[] Eitan's comments have put Deputy Prime Minister Yadin and other cabinet ministers from the Democratic Movement for Change in a particularly awkward position. Dissenters in the party have accused Yadin of deviating from party principles in endorsing the government's more hard-line peace proposals. To deflect some of this criticism, Yadin announced that he would raise the interview at yesterday's cabinet meeting. He probably made only a pro forma complaint in an effort to mollify the dissenters. []

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Pact is likely to respond soon to the NATO proposal--offered just before the recess--that provided assurances to the East on the timing and size of Western reductions and no longer demanded that the USSR make its withdrawal in the form of a tank army in the initial phase of reductions.//

[] //Warsaw Pact delegates said that the Western initiative would receive "careful study," and a ranking official of the Soviet Embassy in Rome termed it a "noticeable step forward."//

[] //The Warsaw Pact will handle its response and further discussions on manpower data with an eye to the opening of the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Disarmament on 23 May. At the UN the East will want to demonstrate that it is seeking progress in the MBFR talks.//

[] //Meanwhile, representatives to NATO in Brussels are disagreeing somewhat as they attempt to develop a Western position on associated measures--steps to be taken in verifying an MBFR agreement and stabilizing measures. West Germany is keenly sensitive to the political implications of certain proposed measures, such as Eastern mobile and aerial observations of West German territory, and is demanding that associated measures be reviewed at the political level before they are remanded to NATO's MBFR working group for technical study.

EGYPT: Referendum Next Sunday

[] In an attempt to silence his opponents, Egyptian President Sadat has called for a referendum next Sunday that could restrict their participation in the public sector.

[] Egyptian voters will be asked whether all those who "call for principles contravening the teaching of religions"--an obvious reference to the Communists--should be barred from key posts in the government, the press, and the unions. The electorate will be asked to ban those leftists who opposed Sadat after the death of former President Nasir and those who took part in politics before the 1952 revolution, a stipulation aimed at the reemergent Wafd party.

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[] Sadat castigated the political opposition, the media, the people's assembly, and other critics. He condemned the left for retaining its clandestine style and branded the Wafd membership as reactionary.

[] Sadat's attempt to silence his critics testifies to their effectiveness. The opposition has taken advantage of Sadat's much vaunted democratization program. His government is increasingly vulnerable because of a shaky economy and a faltering peace initiative.

[] The carefully constructed referendum is intended to provide a veneer of democracy, from which Sadat will argue that his liberalization process remains intact. Sadat's critics will probably escalate their attacks to ensure that he cannot both muzzle them and maintain democratic pretenses. []